CHAPTER 2

History of the Bicycle in Santa Barbara

The Advent of Bicycling in Santa Barbara

When Dixie Thompson, manager of the Arlington Hotel, rode the City of Santa Barbara's first high wheel velocipede bicycle up State Street in 1869, he caused quite a commotion. Bicycles were a rare sight in Santa Barbara until the mid-1880s. But, the bicycle, then as now, provided affordable, simple and equitable freedom of movement for all.

This was the era of the "ordinary," or the high wheeler bicycle. Having a large wheel in front and a tiny one in the back, its rider gained momentum by pushing off the many curbside platforms used to mount horses and enter carriages along the dirt streets of the city.



Soon there were so many cyclists in Santa Barbara that their numbers were causing traffic problems. In 1894 the City Council reacted by passing two ordinances. The first required cowbells on bicycles to warn pedestrians of possible conflicts. The second imposed a speed limit of 7 miles per hour. Bike racks were installed on horse pulled trolleys in 1895, resulting in our nation's first multi-modal application of the new bicycle design.

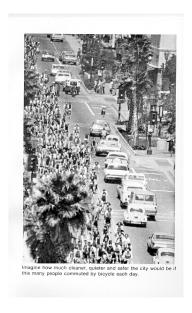
This boom in local bicycling reflected larger national trends of increased ridership and innovative technological changes, including "the safety," a bicycle with two wheels of equal size.

The Automobile Overshadows

This hey-day was short lived. With the appearance of the first automobile on the streets in 1900, Santa Barbara's days of roads filled with bicyclists, pedestrians, and horses were numbered. By

the 1920s, streetcars and automobiles dominated the local streets originally built and paved for bicycle and buggy use. The automobile became accessible to most people, and Santa Barbara joined the nationwide affair with this revolutionary machine. The rapid development of transportation technologies tied outlying land areas to downtown, and many looked for alternatives to city living. First the wealthy, and then the middle class fled the dense and crowded downtown while maintaining access to employment, shopping, and cultural activities.

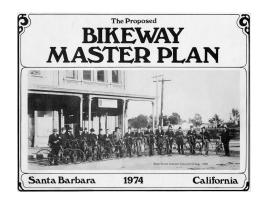
Beginning in the 1920s, land use decisions that separated residential properties from industrial and commercial areas in the City reflected a nationwide trend to distance living spaces from urban unpleasantries such as noise, crowding, and pollution. Transportation and land use planning were influenced by the ability of automobiles to travel longer distances in less time than earlier modes of transportation. Over the years, businesses slowly replaced houses in the downtown area and a regional shopping center was created on Outer State Street. Montecito, Carpinteria, and Goleta Valley have largely become commuter bedroom communities with Santa Barbara the largest employment destination. Even Lompoc, Santa Maria, Santa Ynez, and Ventura are now homes for many working in Santa Barbara. These regional patterns of development and scattering of land uses have limited the possibility of using bicycles, or other car alternatives, for transportation.



On April 22, 1970 the nation's first Earth Day took place. As the decade unfolded, the bicycle blossomed. The environmental awakening of the country triggered an upsurge in bicycling, a pollution free and oil independent vehicle, which also took up less space than the automobile. Some of the nation's first bicycle paths of this modern era were built in Chicago and Massachusetts.

A bike ride to promote bicycle use as a viable form of adult transportation brought out 1000 cyclists on State Street in 1971. In 1972, bicycles outsold cars in the United States-13 million to 11 million (Exploratorium, 1997). Our area's first bicycle advocacy group, Friends for Bikecology, was formed, followed later by another organization called Energy Cycles, and a bicycle column began in the Santa Barbara News-Press. Bicycle related courses were offered by Santa Barbara's Community College District and the guidebook, <u>Discovering Santa Barbara... Without a Car</u> was published.

Bicycle Planning in Santa Barbara



These activities and others provided the setting for the City Council to form the Citizen's Bicycle Transportation Plan Committee that did the groundwork and produced a landmark document that made bold proposals for increased bike usage in the City. The Proposed Bikeway Master Plan (1974) provided the legislative touchstone advocating the implementation of miles of dedicated bikeways in Santa Barbara. Also appearing during this time was Santa Barbara's second multimodal activity, the building and use of trailers for bicycles by the Metropolitan Transit District's (MTD) buses. The City also had a bicycle coordinator and bikes for employees to use.

This Master Plan proposed a network of 27 miles of on-street bikeways and 6.5 miles of off-street bikeways that would be constructed in Phase One. These routes were to meet basic transportation needs as well as providing several of the more important recreational routes (City of Santa Barbara, 1974). Actual construction of the bikeways specified in the Master Plan began with two blocks of painted lines and painted curbs beside the library and Courthouse. At the beach, blue lines painted on the sidewalk several years earlier designated the Cabrillo Boulevard bikeway.

Although many of the bikeways advocated in Phase One of the Bikeway Master Plan have not been constructed, the Plan reflected the City's commitment to promote bicycling as a viable form of transportation. In its development, the plan determined the needs and desires of the community, analyzed existing conditions and developed strategies based upon existing and projected community needs for both recreational and commuter routes. The plan was the result of extensive creative and hard work on the part of the Citizen's Bicycle Transportation Plan Committee and the Transportation Division of the Public Works Department. It involved home interviews, on-street bicycle counts and surveys, and a substantial inventory of available routes.

The Automobile Generation

Unfortunately, the rebirth of the bicycle was temporary. With a focus on facility changes, the Bicycle Master Plan accomplished many of its infrastructure construction goals, providing bikeway facilities that are in steady use today such as the Beachway and State Street bike lanes. However, because the plan primarily addressed the construction of bikeways and parking, it fell short on developing a comprehensive plan for increasing ridership and legitimizing the role of the bicycle in the City.

The 1980s and the early 1990s brought the transportation planning focus back to the automobile. Traffic congestion had become intolerable and the citizenry passed Measure D in 1989, funding numerous regional and local road projects. On Highway 101, Caltrans completed a widening to six lanes between Goleta and Santa Barbara. The crosstown freeway was also completed, removing the last traffic light on the 101 between Los Angeles and San Francisco. These improvements dramatically reduced freeway congestion, but not for long. Freeway interchange expansions to accommodate the additional traffic delivered onto our City streets by the six-lane project quickly became overcrowded. Based on the current distribution of land uses and growth rates of Goleta and Santa Barbara, the pressure to have eight lanes of freeway may not be far off. However, nationally, transportation experts are beginning to realize that increasing capacity may not be the best long-term strategy for increasing the level of service on our streets.

Rethinking Transportation Solutions

City planners realize that increased road capacity encourages increased traffic volumes and imbalanced land use patterns. They recognize that we can not build our way out of congestion and that the construction of more and wider roads, even where possible, threatens to erode the traditional fabric of the city and the quality of life Santa Barbarans desire to protect and preserve. Finally, the focus of State and Federal funding sources is shifting, as funds are available not only for new automobile facilities but also for improved and balanced transportation projects.

Consequently, planners and decision-makers are rethinking transportation solutions that include land use development strategies, non-motorized facilities, and the promotion of alternative vehicle use. Although the automobile will likely remain the dominant form of transportation, as long as fuels are available and inexpensive, the bicycle's role can become increasingly important. The City of Santa Barbara once again is recognizing that a better future for the bicycle can help to maintain and enhance our quality of life and healthy economic growth.

The Circulation Element of the General Plan

In 1964 our General Plan recognized the importance of pedestrians and bicyclists and reducing reliance on the automobile. Since that time, planners and decision-makers have struggled to increase road and parking capacity while, at the same time, promoting alternatives to the automobile. In 1997, the Circulation Element of the Santa Barbara General Plan was updated and approved. This forward thinking document represents a landmark decision to change the city's transportation direction. The vision and goals describe a city that strives for equality among all modes of transportation, increasing opportunities for walking, bicycling, and transit.

The Bicycle Master Plan

The Circulation Element directed the update of the Bicycle Master Plan, which has been written as a guide to making the bicycle an important mode of transportation that can be used safely and enjoyably throughout the City of Santa Barbara. The intent also is to raise public awareness relating to the values of the bicycle for transportation and to move toward equal representation of bicycle needs in relation to other modes. The Plan has outlined an implementation strategy to shape Santa Barbara's bicycle future.